

**COMPARISON OF EFFICACY OF ORAL VERSUS INTRAMUSCULAR  
VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> SUPPLEMENTATION FOR TREATMENT OF  
VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> DEFICIENCY  
AND  
DETERMINATION OF CELLULAR DEFICIENCY OF VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> USING  
SERUM HOMOCYSTEINE AS A SURROGATE MARKER IN PATIENTS  
WITH LOW NORMAL SERUM VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> LEVELS**



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in  
GASTROENTEROLOGY  
(Branch IV)**

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## **CERTIFICATE BY THE GUIDE**

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **“COMPARISON OF EFFICACY OF ORAL VERSUS INTRAMUSCULAR VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> SUPPLEMENTATION FOR TREATMENT OF VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> DEFICIENCY AND DETERMINATION OF CELLULAR DEFICIENCY OF VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> USING SERUM HOMOCYSTEINE AS A SURROGATE MARKER IN PATIENTS WITH LOW NORMAL SERUM VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> LEVELS”** is a bonafide work done by **DR. ARUN R.S.** in partial fulfillment of the requirement of regulations of the Tamil Nadu Dr.MGR Medical university, Chennai for the award of the degree of Doctor of Medicine in Gastroenterology.

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THE HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT AND THE PRINCIPAL**

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “**COMPARISON OF EFFICACY OF ORAL VERSUS INTRAMUSCULAR VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> SUPPLEMENTATION FOR TREATMENT OF VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> DEFICIENCY AND DETERMINATION OF CELLULAR DEFICIENCY OF VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> USING SERUM HOMOCYSTEINE AS A SURROGATE MARKER IN PATIENTS WITH LOW NORMAL SERUM VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> LEVELS**” is a bonafide work done by **DR.ARUN R.S.** under my overall guidance and with the direct guidance and supervision of **DR. ASHOK CHACKO** M.B.B.S.,M.D.,DM.,MNAMS.,FRCP., Professor and Head, Department of Gastrointestinal Sciences, Christian Medical College, Vellore, in partial fulfillment of regulations of the Tamil Nadu Dr.MGR Medical university, Chennai, for the award of degree of Doctor of Medicine in Gastroenterology.

I have immense pleasure in forwarding this dissertation to the Tamil Nadu Dr.MGR Medical university, Chennai .

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## **ABSTRACT**

**TITLE :** Comparison of efficacy of oral versus intramuscular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation for treatment of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency and determination of cellular deficiency of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> using serum homocysteine as a surrogate marker in patients with low normal serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels

**AIMS AND OBJECTIVES :** To compare the efficacy of oral versus intramuscular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation for the treatment of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency and to determine whether patients with low normal serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels have vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency at cellular level, using serum homocysteine as a surrogate marker

**MATERIALS AND METHOD :** Consecutive patients with vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency attending department of gastrointestinal sciences and satisfying the inclusion criteria during November 2009 to November 2010 were enrolled in a prospective randomized open label clinical trial to compare the efficacy of oral versus intramuscular treatment and followed up for 3 months. An intention to treat analysis was done using SPSS 16.0 software. Mann-Whitney U test was used for continuous variables and Fisher's exact test for categorical data. For the cross sectional study to determine the cellular deficiency of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> using serum homocysteine levels as surrogate marker, consecutive patients with a serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> <400pg/ml during the above study period were enrolled and Spearman's correlational studies were used.

**RESULTS :** 60 patients (44male,16 female) were randomized in 1:1 ratio into oral and intramuscular treatment groups. The intention to treat analysis revealed no significant difference in the treatment response between the study groups( $p=0.06$ ). The intramuscular treatment was three times costlier than oral therapy. The most common cause of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency was pernicious anaemia. 74% of patients with low normal serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels had hyperhomocysteinemia suggestive of cellular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency.



**CONCLUSIONS :** Oral vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation is cheaper than and equally effective as intramuscular treatment for vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency. The most common etiology for vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency in a tertiary care hospital setting in India is pernicious anemia. A majority of patients with low normal serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels (200-400pg/ml) have hyperhomocysteinemia, suggestive of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency at cellular level. Serum homocysteine is a useful ancillary test for the diagnosis of intracellular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency in patients with low normal serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels.

**KEY WORDS :** vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, homocysteine, randomized trial, intracellular deficiency

## INTRODUCTION

There is a high prevalence of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency in rural as well as urban population in India (1) . The etiology and risk factors in our population has however, not been adequately studied so far.

The diagnosis of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency is hampered by the lack of a gold standard diagnostic test. Studies have shown that serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels do not accurately reflect its deficiency at a cellular level, especially in the low normal range (2). The cellular deficiency of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> is associated with elevated homocysteine levels, which is an important risk factor for cardiovascular morbidity (3). Hence it may be important to measure serum homocysteine, which is a cheap and sensitive surrogate marker of cellular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency, to identify a subgroup with intracellular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency among individuals with low normal serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels, who may benefit from therapy.

The current recommendation for treatment of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency is intramuscular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation for an indefinite period, which has serious implications on cost and convenience, in addition to injection related complications. Studies from western countries suggest that high dose oral vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation may be an equally effective alternative to intramuscular treatment (4). However, the reports favouring oral vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation should be interpreted with caution in the Indian context, in view of morphological differences in the intestinal mucosa, high prevalence of intestinal parasitic infestations and uniqueness in the composition of intestinal microbiota reported in previous studies(5). So far, there have been no studies substantiating the efficacy of oral vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation in Indian subjects. Hence there is an imminent need to evaluate the efficacy of cheaper and convenient option of oral therapy compared to the conventional intramuscular treatment for vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency.

It is also important to identify the treatable etiological factors responsible for vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency which may enable definitive therapy for a finite period instead of lifelong vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation. Though pernicious anaemia and food cobalamin malabsorption have been reported to be the common causes in other parts of the world, there could be other potentially treatable causes in the Indian context, on account of the differences in gut characteristics in our population, as discussed above.

The present study was therefore conceived to address these important aspects of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency such as comparison of efficacy of oral versus intramuscular treatment for vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency, elucidation of its causes in a tertiary care setting, and to evaluate whether the patients with low normal serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels have adequate intracellular function of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> using serum homocysteine as a surrogate marker.

## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

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- (i) To compare the efficacy of oral versus intramuscular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation for the treatment of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency.
- (ii) To determine whether patients with low normal serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels have vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency at cellular level, using serum homocysteine as a surrogate marker.
- (iii) To identify the causes of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency in a tertiary care setting.

# **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

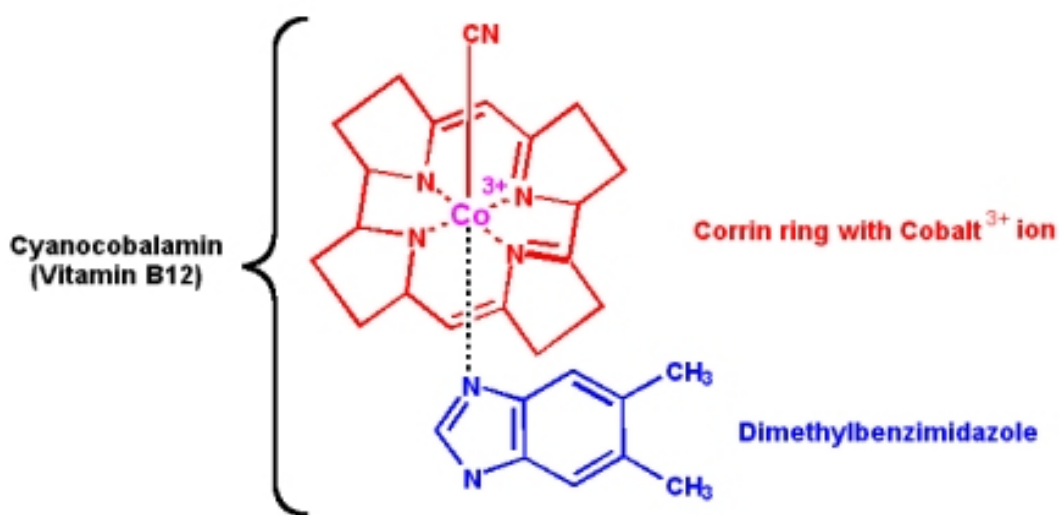
### HISTORY

The observation that pernicious anaemia responds to treatment with liver extracts in the early twentieth century heralded the search for the ‘anti pernicious anaemia factor’, which culminated in the isolation and crystallization of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> a few decades later. The X-ray structure of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> was subsequently elucidated in 1955 by Dorothy Hodgkin. It was only in 1972 that the total synthesis of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> was elucidated after a decade long collective effort of over a hundred scientists (6).

### STRUCTURE OF VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub>

Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> is a cobalt containing molecule with octahedral structure as shown in figure 1. It is the largest and the most complex of all vitamins.

**Figure.1 Structure of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>**



**Figure 1**

## **DIETARY SOURCES AND BIOAVAILABILITY**

The major dietary sources of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> are fish, shell fish, meat, milk and eggs. The bioavailability of the vitamin from animal sources is about 50% (except eggs which have a bioavailability of <9%). Though algae and blue green algae contain large amounts of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, these compounds are inactive in mammals ('pseudovitamin B<sub>12</sub>') (7).

The recommended minimum daily requirement for cyanocobalamin is approximately 2.4 micrograms (8).

## **VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> METABOLISM**

During gastric digestion, vitamin B<sub>12</sub> in food is released and forms a stable complex with gastric R-binder or haptocorrin (a glycoprotein of unknown function present in secretions like saliva, gastric juice etc). On entering duodenum, this complex is digested releasing the vitamin which then binds to the intrinsic factor (a glycoprotein produced by parietal cells of stomach). The vitamin-intrinsic factor complex is resistant to proteolysis and travels down to the distal ileum where it binds to specific receptor called cubulin-amnionless in the mucosal brush border. The complex is then taken into the ileal enterocyte where the intrinsic factor is destroyed and the vitamin is transferred to transcobalamin II. The intrinsic factor mediated absorption of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> in human beings becomes saturated at 1.5 - 2.0 micrograms per meal.

The mechanism of release of the vitamin from intrinsic factor and its exit from the ileal enterocyte is not fully understood (9). About 10-30% of cobalamin in plasma is bound to transcobalamin (referred to as holotranscobalamin, which is the metabolically active form of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>) and the remaining is transported as a complex with haptocorrin. The



transcobalamin-vitamin B<sub>12</sub> complex enters the target cells after attaching to the TC II receptor (10)

In addition to the above mechanism, about 1% of orally administered vitamin B<sub>12</sub> can be absorbed by a passive mechanism throughout the intestine (this is the rationale for oral vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation)(4)

The vitamin B<sub>12</sub> taken up by the target cell is usually retained and utilized after conversion into its coenzyme forms –methyl and adenosylcobalamin(11). Within the cell, vitamin B<sub>12</sub> is crucial for three enzymatic processes

- Methylcobalamin is required as a cofactor for the conversion of homocysteine to methionine. Therefore, vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency increases serum homocysteine levels.
- Adenosylcobalamin is a cofactor for the conversion of methylmalonyl Co A to succinyl Co A.
- Methylcobalamin is necessary for the conversion of 5-methyltetrahydrofolate to tetrahydrofolate which is required for DNA and red blood cell production.

The absorption of dietary vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, transportation to cells and the physiological role of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> is outlined in figure 2 (12).

Figure.2 vitamin B<sub>12</sub> metabolism

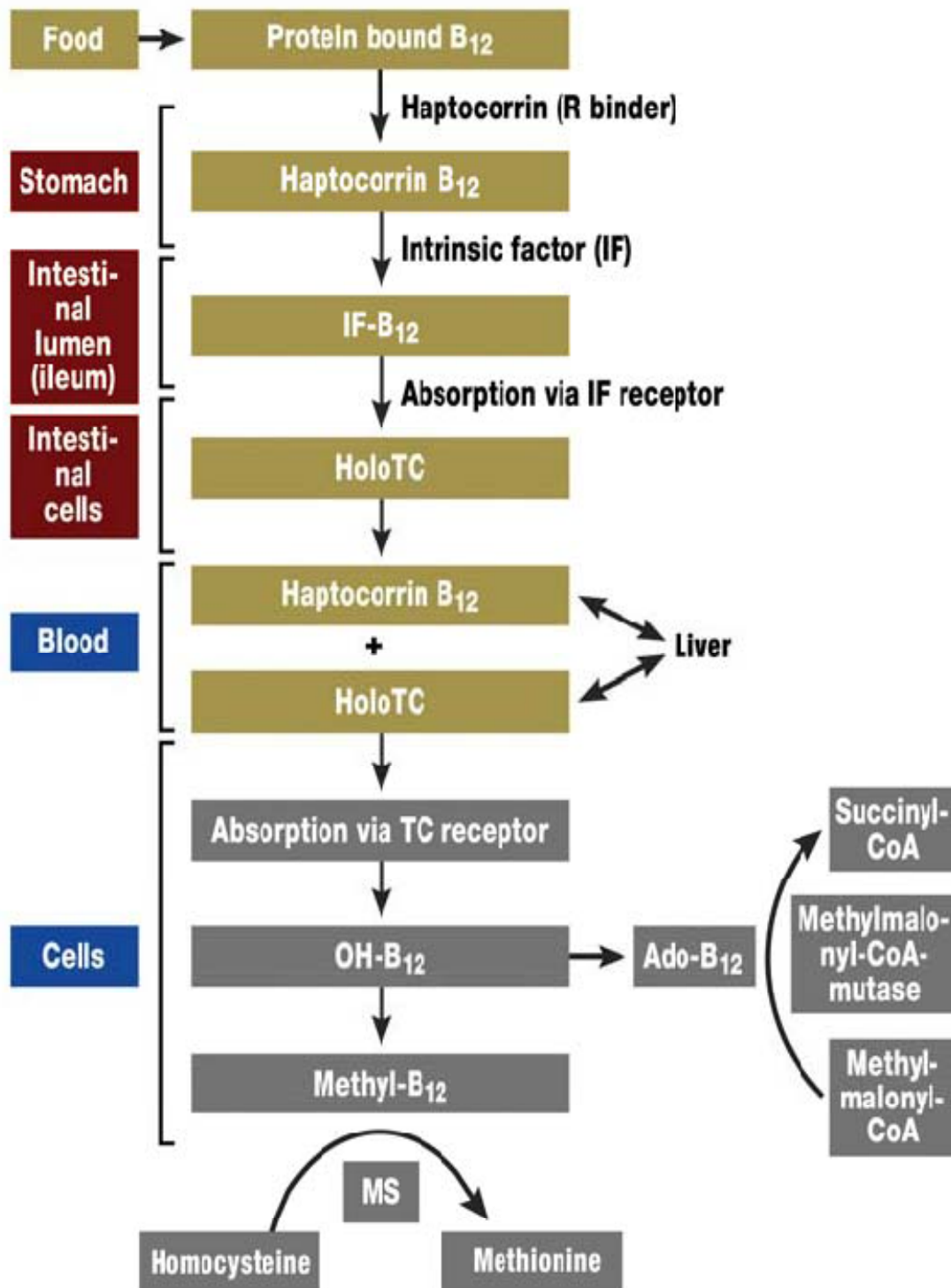


Figure 2

## **VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> DEFICIENCY**

### **Definition**

Considerable variation exists in the definition of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency owing to the lack of a gold standard test for the diagnosis. However, the widely accepted definitions are listed below (13):

- Serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels <150 pmol/l (<200 pg/ml) along with clinical and/or hematological features of cobalamin deficiency.
- Serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels <150 pmol/l on two separate occasions.
- Serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels <150 pmol/l and serum homocysteine levels >13 mmol/l or methylmalonic acid levels >0.4 mmol/l ( after excluding renal failure , folic acid and vitamin B<sub>6</sub> deficiencies).
- Serum holotranscobalamin levels <35 pmol/l.

### **Epidemiology**

The estimated prevalence of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency varies, depending on the diagnostic criteria used. The prevalence reported from various other countries are listed below (table 1).

Refsum et al, in their study on a selected urban population from Pune, India reported that about 75% had metabolic evidence consistent with vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency that can only partly be explained by a vegetarian diet(14). In another study on rural as well as urban subjects, Yajnik and colleagues demonstrated that 67% of middle aged men from western India had vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency(1).

**Table 1. Prevalence of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency**

Author	Year	Number of patients	Cut off serum B12 level (pmol/L)	Prevalence (%)
<b>Blundell et al(15) (UK)</b>	1985	200 geriatric inpatients	<122	10.0
<b>Hanger et al(16) (New Zealand)</b>	1991	204 geriatric subjects in community	<114	7.3
<b>Pennypacker et al(17) (USA)</b>	1992	152 geriatric outpatients	<221 and elevated homocysteine/MMA	14.5
<b>Lindenbaum et al(18) (USA)</b>	1994	548 (Framingham cohort)	<258 and elevated homocysteine/MMA	11.3
<b>Matchar et al(19) (USA)</b>	1994	1599 inpatients and outpatients	<133 and clinical signs, MMA	5.2

**Table 1**

### **Natural history of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency**

Table 2 illustrates the stages in the clinical progression of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency(20)

**Table 2. Stages of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency**

<b>Stage 1</b>	<b>Circulating serum B<sub>12</sub> levels depleted</b>	<b>typically asymptomatic can remain so for several years</b>
<b>Stage 2</b>	<b>Cellular stores of B<sub>12</sub> are depleted</b>	<b>can remain asymptomatic. can also continue for several years.</b>
<b>Stage 3</b>	<b>Evidence of biochemical deficiency -increases in serum Homocysteine, MMA (methyl malonic acid)</b>	<b>Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> is required for the conversion of these compounds</b>
<b>Stage 4</b>	<b>Clinical signs and symptoms apparent</b>	<b>manifestations is broad and the sequence varies markedly</b>

**Table 2**

## **ETIOLOGY OF VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> DEFICIENCY**

Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency may result from various inherited or acquired disorders as described below:

### **I. Inherited causes of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency(21)**

#### **A. Disorders affecting absorption**

- (i) Congenital pernicious anaemia- characterized by intrinsic factor deficiency. Gastric acid secretion and mucosal architecture are normal. The condition is rare and fewer than 100 cases only have been reported so far. It is treated by lifelong parenteral vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation.
- (ii) Imerslund-Graessbeck syndrome- a rare, potentially fatal condition presenting in children of 3-10years, caused by mutations affecting CUBN gene which encodes cubulin- the high affinity receptor for intrinsic factor-cobalamin complex in ileum- resulting in malabsorption of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>. More than 250 cases have been reported worldwide so far. Lifelong parenteral vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation is effective.

#### **B. Disorders of transport**

- (i) Congenital transcobalamin deficiency- manifests in early infancy with macrocytic anemia, failure to thrive, and/or neurological features. Less than 50 cases have been reported in literature till date. The serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels are characteristically normal, as 80% of cobalamin in blood is bound to haptocorrin rather than transcobalamin.

### C. Disorders of intracellular metabolism

- (i) The conversion of the vitamin to its coenzymes- methyl and adenosyl cobalamin- requires a series of biochemical modifications. Mutations in specific genes have been described for five of the eight complementation groups involved in this process

## II. Acquired causes of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency

### A. Nutritional causes

- (i) Malnutrition
- (ii) Vegetarian diet- a systematic comparison a group of US, Dutch, and British vegans with nonvegetarians from respective countries found that many of the vegans had significantly lower vitamin B<sub>12</sub> concentrations compared to the nonvegetarians(22). Subsequently, Dhopeswarkar and colleagues demonstrated that asymptomatic Indian lactovegetarians, who form the majority of Indian population, had significantly lower serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> concentrations than nonvegetarians(23). This was confirmed by later studies from different geographic regions in India(24), as well as the other parts of the world(25).

## B. Defects in absorption

- (i) Food cobalamin malabsorption- defined as “a syndrome characterized by the inability of the body to release cobalamin from food or intestinal transport proteins, particularly in the presence of hypochlorhydria, where the absorption of ‘unbound’ cobalamin is normal(26)”. It is arguably the most common cause of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency in elderly patients(27)

### Diagnostic criteria(28):

- Serum cobalamin level < 150 pmol/L
- Result of standard Schilling test (with free cyanocobalamin marked with cobalt-58) is normal, or result of modified Schilling test (using radioactive cobalamin bound to food protein) is abnormal
- No dietary cobalamin deficiency (intake > 2 µg/day)

### Associated conditions(13):

- Atrophic gastritis, chronic H pylori infection
- Small intestinal bacterial overgrowth
- Long-term ingestion of H<sub>2</sub>-receptor antagonists, proton pump inhibitors or biguanides
- Chronic alcoholism
- Gastrectomy, gastric bypass surgery
- Pancreatic exocrine failure
- Advanced age

(ii) Lack of intrinsic factor or parietal cells

- Pernicious anaemia(or Biermer's disease) – a cell mediated autoimmune disease characterised by destruction of gastric fundic mucosa and presence of auto antibodies such as anti parietal cell antibody and anti intrinsic factor antibody(29). It accounts for 15-50% of cases of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency. Associated conditions include autoimmune disorders like vitiligo, dysthyroidism, Addison's disease, Sjögren's syndrome as well as gastric neoplasms like adenocarcinomas, lymphomas and carcinoid tumours(30).
- Atrophic gastritis
- Gastrectomy

(iii) Ileal disease

- Crohns disease
- Ileal resection

(iv) Biologic competition

- Bacterial overgrowth
- Fish tapeworm infestation

C. Defects in transport

(i) Transcobalamin II deficiency



## **CLINICAL FEATURES (31)**

The majority of patients with vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency are asymptomatic. Less than 10% of patients have one or more of the classically described manifestations, which are listed below.

- **Hematologic**
  - Megaloblastic anemia
  - Pancytopenia (leukopenia, thrombocytopenia)
- **Neurologic**
  - Paraesthesias
  - Peripheral neuropathy
  - demyelinating disease of dorsal columns and corticospinal tract
- **Psychiatric**
  - Irritability, personality change
  - Mild memory impairment, dementia
  - Depression
  - Psychosis
- **Cardiovascular**
  - increased risk of myocardial ischaemia and cerebrovascular accidents

Increasingly, the existence of “iceberg phenomenon” for vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency has been recognized and the entity of subclinical vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency has been defined as “an asymptomatic state of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency where metabolic deficiency is demonstrable” (32). Table 3 illustrates the features of subclinical cobalamin deficiency.

**Table 3. Comparison of clinical and subclinical vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency**

	<b>Clinical deficiency</b>	<b>Subclinical deficiency</b>
<b>Symptoms and signs</b>	Present	Absent (may have electrophysiological changes)
<b>Serum B12 levels</b>	Low in 97% (<200pg/ml)	Usually low, but may be low normal
<b>Frequency</b>	<10% with serum B12 less than 200pg/ml	70% with serum B12 <200pg/ml 30% serum B12 200-400 range
<b>Course</b>	Progressive	Unknown, may progress slowly
<b>Cause</b>	Identifiable in most cases	Identifiable only in about 50%
<b>Treatment</b>	Mandatory	Advisable, dose unclear

**Table 3**

## **DIAGNOSIS**

There is no universally accepted gold standard diagnostic test for vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency. Therefore, the diagnosis is based on a constellation of clinical, haematological and biochemical parameters. Various serum biomarkers of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency have been reported to be useful in this regard.

### **Serum Biomarkers of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency(33)**

Though serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> estimation is widely used cost effectively as the diagnostic test of choice, it has only a limited sensitivity and specificity, especially in persons with vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels less than 400 pmol/L(low normal/ borderline range)(25).

In a study by Solomon et al, the median intraindividual variation in measured serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels was 23 % and absolute differences >100 pmol/L on repeat testing was noted in 21 % patients (34). Stabler et al estimated that 5-10% of patients with serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels between 200 and 300 pg/mL and 0.1% to 1% with levels higher than 330pg/mL have a tissue deficiency of cobalamin(2).

The serum levels of homocysteine and methyl malonic acid are elevated in vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency and have been shown to be reliable markers for tissue deficiency of cobalamin(35)

The various serum markers useful for the diagnosis of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency are listed below in table 4.

**Table.4 Serum biomarkers of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency**

<b>Marker</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
<b>Serum homocysteine</b>	High sensitivity, cheap, easily available
<b>Serum methyl malonic acid</b>	High sensitivity as well as specificity Requires mass spectrophotometry Available only at select centres
<b>Plasma holotranscobalamin</b>	Earliest marker to be elevated

**Table 4**

### **Usefulness of serum homocysteine in the diagnosis of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency**

Serum homocysteine estimation is a cheap, widely available and sensitive test (95.9%) for the detection of cellular deficiency of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> and correlate well with methyl malonic acid levels (36). Studies have demonstrated a strong inverse correlation between serum levels of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> and homocysteine(14),(37).

However, elevation of serum homocysteine may also occur in smokers, alcohol abuse, renal failure and folate deficiency and these should be excluded before attributing it to vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency. Serum homocysteine has been reported as a useful adjunct for the determination of cellular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency in patients with low normal/ borderline serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels(33).

### **Functional tests of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> absorption(33)**

- (i) Schilling's test : considered as gold standard functional test of cobalamin absorption. However need for radiolabelled cobalamin, cumbersome method and limited usefulness in renal failure, has made it impractical at present.
- (ii) Cobasorb test: a promising functional test which measures vitamin B<sub>12</sub> absorption by estimating the increase in holotranscobalamin with and without intrinsic factor administration. The test requires further evaluation before it can be incorporated into routine clinical use.

## **TREATMENT OF VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> DEFICIENCY**

Conventionally, vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency has been treated by parenteral (intramuscular route) supplementation with cyanacobalamin. However growing evidence suggests that oral vitamin B<sub>12</sub> may be as good an option, regardless of the cause of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency (38). The recommended standard treatment for vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency is described below.

### **(i) Parenteral route**

Intramuscular injection (over deltoid muscle) 1000µg daily for one week, followed by once a week for 8 weeks followed by a monthly maintenance dose of 1000µg, usually lifelong – especially in the case of pernicious anemia

### **(ii) Oral route**

500µg daily for nutritional deficiency as well as food cobalamin malabsorption and 1000µg daily for pernicious anemia(28)

## **Rationale for oral vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation**

- the main causes of cobalamin deficiency in the elderly are food-cobalamin malabsorption (50–70%) and pernicious anaemia (20–30%)
- between 1 and 5% of free cobalamin (or crystalline cobalamin) is absorbed along the entire intestine by passive diffusion(9)

## **Evidence for oral vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation**

The various studies supporting oral vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation are listed below in table 5 (39),(40)

**Table 5. Studies on efficacy of oral vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation**

<b>Study design</b>	<b>Study population(n)</b>	<b>Dose, duration of treatment</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>Reference</b>
<b>Open prospective</b>	Food cobalamin malabsorption  n=10	650µg/day 3 months	Normalization of serum B12 -80% Clinical improvement-20% Mean increase in Hb-1.9g/dl Mean decrease in MCV-7.8fl No adverse events	(41)
<b>Open prospective</b>	Non pernicious anemia  n=20	1000µg/day 1 week	Normalization of serum B12 -85% No adverse events	(42)
<b>Open prospective</b>	Food cobalamin malabsorption  n=30	250-1000µg/day 1 month	Normalization of serum B12 -87% Mean increase in Hb-0.6g/dl Mean decrease in MCV-3fl Dose effect≥500µg/day No adverse events	(43)
<b>Open prospective</b>	Non pernicious anemia  n=30	125-1000µg/day 1 week	Normalization of serum B12 in all patients with at least one dose of ≥250µg/day Dose effect≥500µg/day No adverse events	(44)
<b>Open prospective</b>	Pernicious anemia  n=10	1000µg/day 3 months	Normalization of serum B12 -90% Clinical improvement-30% Mean increase in Hb-2.45g/dl Mean decrease in MCV-10.4fl No adverse events	(45)

**Table 5**

An evidence-based analysis by the Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> Cochrane Group concluded that the efficacy of oral cobalamin therapy, with a dose between 1000 and 2000 micrograms given initially daily and then weekly, is comparable to parenteral vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation, based on review of two randomized control trials described below (46) in table 6.

**Table 6. Clinical trials on oral versus intramuscular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation**

Study	Year	Randomization method	Number	Withdrawal	Intent to treat	Follow up
Kuzminski(47)	1998	Unclear Not blinded	38	5	No	4 months
Bolaman (48)	2003	Block randomization Not blinded	70	10	No	3 months

**Table 6**

However, it must be borne in mind that the effect of oral cobalamin treatment in patients presenting with severe neurological deficits has not been adequately studied till date. Therefore, parenteral cobalamin therapy remains recommended for these patients.(33)

## **MATERIALS AND METHOD**



## **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

### **Study setting**

Department of Gastrointestinal sciences, Christian medical college, Vellore

### **Study period**

November 2009 to November 2010

## **I. Comparison of efficacy of oral versus intramuscular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation**

### **Study design**

Single centre prospective open label randomized intervention trial

### **Inclusion Criteria**

All patients with documented vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency (serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> level <200pg/ml)

who consent for the study

### **Exclusion criteria**

1. Age <18years
2. Pregnant individuals
3. Renal failure
4. Special cases where parenteral B<sub>12</sub> supplementation is mandatory  
(eg: those patients with severe neurological deficits, intestinal failure etc)
5. Already taking vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplements

## **Definitions**

- (i) Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency : serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels less than 200 pg/ml
- (ii) Treatment response : improvement in symptoms or signs along with either of the following – post treatment serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> > 200 pg/ml or post treatment serum homocysteine levels less than 13µM/L
- (iii) Pernicious anemia : evidence of destruction of gastric fundic mucosa and presence of auto antibodies such as anti parietal cell antibody and/or anti intrinsic factor antibody
- (iv) Food cobalamin malabsorption : a syndrome characterized by the inability of the body to release cobalamin from food or intestinal transport proteins, particularly in the presence of hypochlorhydria, where the absorption of ‘unbound’ cobalamin is normal
- (v) Vegetarian : total abstinence from nonvegetarian diet at least during the last 3 years
- (vi) Significant Proton pump inhibitor(PPI)/Metformin/H<sub>2</sub> receptor antagonists (H<sub>2</sub>RA) use : uninterrupted regular use for at least 6 months.
- (vii) Celiac sprue : Marsh III or above changes on duodenal biopsy along with IgA anti tissue transglutaminase (anti TTG) seropositivity
- (viii) Tropical sprue : intestinal mucosal disease characterized by malabsorption of two or more unrelated nutrient groups where other known causes of malabsorption have been excluded.

## **Sample size**

For comparison of oral versus intramuscular treatment groups,

Formula : number of patients,  $n = \frac{2 S_p^2 (z_{1-\alpha/2} + z_{1-\beta/2})^2}{\mu_d^2}$

where  $S_p^2 = \frac{s_1^2 + s_2^2}{2}$

$S_p$ -standard deviation of mean of two groups

$S_1^2$ - standard deviation of group 1 (intramuscular)

$S_2^2$ - standard deviation of group 2 (oral)

$\mu_d^2$ - mean difference between samples

$\alpha$ -significance level

$1-\beta$  – power of the study

The values used for calculation were derived from a study comparing oral versus intramuscular vitamin B12 by Kuzminski and colleagues(47)

[s1-165,s2-595,  $\mu_d$ -400,  $\alpha$ -5%,  $1-\beta$ -80%]

The calculated sample size, **n = 19** in each arm of the study

## **Outcome measures**

### **Primary outcome**

– normalization of serum vitamin B12 levels after treatment

### **Secondary outcome**

–clinical: improvement in symptoms and signs after treatment

- lab: change in Haemoglobin and MCV after treatment

- compliance with either forms of therapy

The study was approved by the ethics committee and the institutional review board of Christian Medical College, Vellore.

Data was collected by the principal investigator using a standard proforma (annexure1) after obtaining informed consent.

All the patients found to have vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency underwent a comprehensive etiological evaluation and those who consented for the clinical trial were randomly assigned to oral or intramuscular treatment groups in a 1:1 ratio. The randomization schedule was computer generated with concealed allocation and was prepared by someone uninvolved in the study. As the primary outcome measures were objective laboratory test reports, the use of placebo was not considered.

The etiological evaluation included complete blood counts, pernicious anemia antibody screening, IgG anti TTG estimation, HIV serology, stool examination for parasites, endoscopic mucosal biopsy from fundus and antrum of the stomach, duodenum as well as ileum, abdominal imaging with either a contrast enhanced CT scan or a combination of ultrasound and barium meal follow through, as well as urine or blood xylose estimation to assess mucosal malabsorption.

The study subjects in the oral group received 1000µg methylcobalamin tablets daily and those in the intramuscular group received 1000µg methylcobalamin over deltoid region daily for the first week of treatment followed by weekly injections for 8 weeks and monthly injections subsequently till review. The patients were followed up during the hospital visit after completion of 3 months of treatment and clinical as well as laboratory parameters were reviewed. Compliance was assessed by patient's account as well as pill / ampoule count and injection records where available.

## **II. Determination of intracellular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency in patients with low normal serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels using serum homocysteine as a surrogate marker**

### **Study design**

Cross sectional observation study

### **Inclusion criteria**

All patients with a serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> level less than 400pg/ml who consent for the study

### **Exclusion criteria**

1. Age <18years
2. Serum creatinine >1.4mg/dl
3. Folic acid deficiency (serum folate <3ng/ml)
4. Pregnancy
5. Smoking or alcohol abuse
6. Levodopa therapy
7. Familial hyperhomocysteinemia

### **Definitions**

- (i) Low normal / Borderline vitamin B<sub>12</sub> : serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels between 200 to 400 pg/ml
- (ii) Hyperhomocysteinemia : serum total homocysteine levels more than 13  $\mu$ M /L

### **Sample size**

For determination of sample size, values were derived from studies by Yao et al (49) and Delva et al (50).

Using nMaster software, estimated sample size, **n=40**

Where [sensitivity of serum homocysteine (new test)-96%, sensitivity of serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> (reference test)-80%,  $\alpha$ - 5%, 1- $\beta$  -80%]

The study was approved by the ethics committee and the institutional review board of Christian Medical College, Vellore

Data was collected by the principal investigator using a standard proforma (annexure1) after obtaining informed consent.

### **Measurement**

Serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> was estimated by electrochemiluminescence immunoassay (ECLIA) method (normal>200pg/ml) and high performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) method was used for serum homocysteine estimation (normal<13 $\mu$ M)

## **STATISTICAL METHODS**

Data was analysed using SPSS software version 16.0. Continuous data is presented as mean with standard deviation and categorical data as proportions. Baseline characteristics were analyzed using Mann-Whitney U test for continuous variables and Fisher's exact test for categorical data. For the comparison of oral and intramuscular treatment groups, an intention to treat analysis was performed, assuming a negative treatment response for the patients who did not complete the study. A per protocol analysis was also done. In addition to descriptive statistics, Spearman's correlation was used to analyze the relationship between vitamin B<sub>12</sub> and homocysteine.

## **RESULTS**



## RESULTS

The study analysed multiple aspects of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency such as

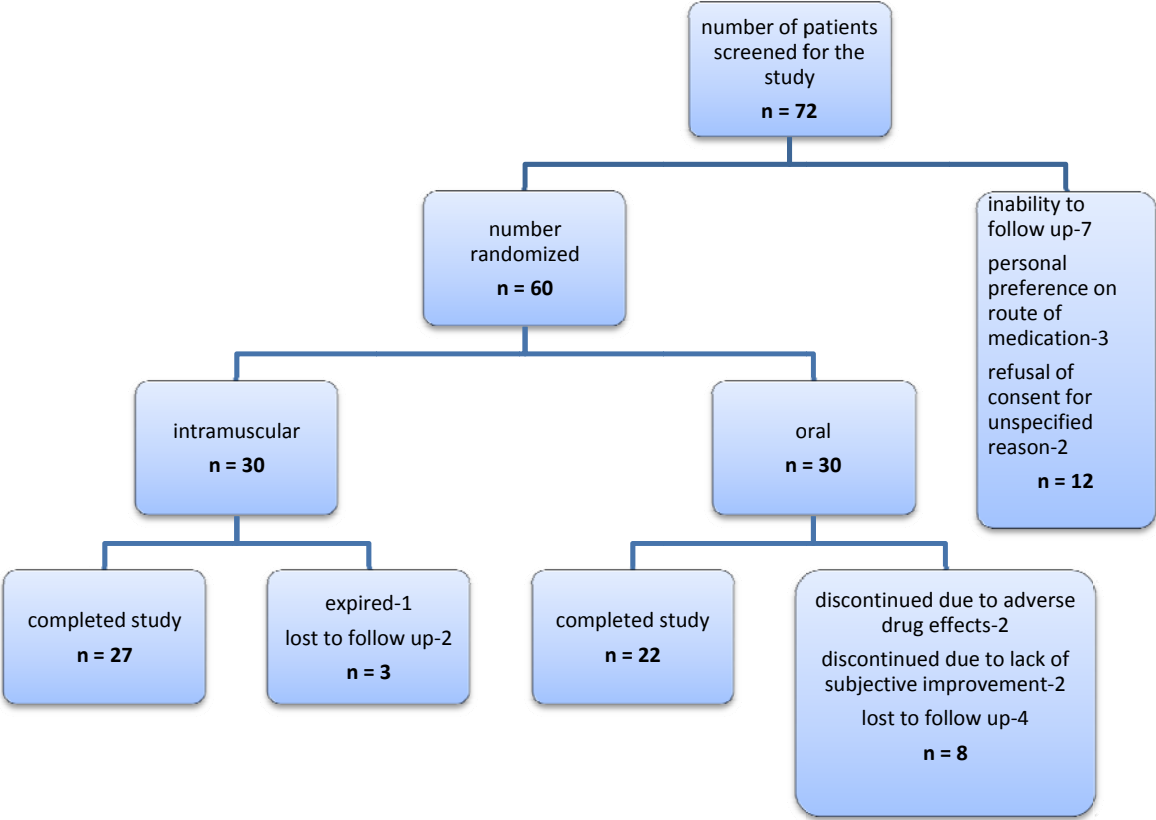
- (i) Comparison of efficacy of oral versus parenteral vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation
- (ii) Etiology of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency in tertiary care setting
- (iii) Correlation between serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> and serum homocysteine (a marker of intracellular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> function) in patients with low normal serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels

The results are discussed below separately.

### **I. Randomized trial of oral versus intramuscular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation**

72 patients were found to have vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency, of which 60 subjects who consented for the therapeutic trial were randomized to oral and intramuscular treatment groups in a 1:1 ratio. 27 patients in the intramuscular group and 22 patients in the oral group completed the study, as described in figure 3 below.

**Figure 3. Randomized trial of oral versus intramuscular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation**



**Figure 3**

## Baseline characteristics

The baseline characteristics of both the study groups are illustrated below in table 7

**Table 7. Baseline characteristics of oral and intramuscular treatment groups**

Characteristics	Intramuscular	Oral	P value
<b>Number of patients, n</b>	30	30	-
<b>Male gender (n,%)</b>	25 (83.3%)	19 (63.3%)	0.14
<b>Mean age (years)</b>	44.3±9.3	38.6±14.8	0.06
<b>Clinical features</b>			
Diarrhea	19	11	0.07
Anorexia	11	18	0.12
Skin hyperpigmentation	2	4	0.67
Neurological features	4	1	0.35
Pallor	6	7	0.76
No symptoms/signs	5	7	0.75
<b>Comorbidities</b>			
Diabetes	2	4	0.67
Hypertension	3	6	0.47
<b>Cause of B<sub>12</sub> deficiency</b>			
Pernicious anemia	7	6	1.00
Atrophic gastritis	6	6	1.00
Celiac sprue	2	2	1.00
Tropical sprue/enteropathy	1	4	0.35
Vegetarian diet	1	3	0.61
Ileal resection	1	1	1.00
Multiple causes	8	4	0.30
No cause identified	4	4	1.00
<b>H.pylori infection</b>	20	17	0.60
<b>APCA</b>	10	10	1.0
<b>Anti IF</b>	5	2	0.42
<b>IgA anti TTG</b>	7	6	1.00
<b>Pre-treatment Hb (g/dl)</b>	12.4±2.7	11.7±2.4	0.17
<b>Pre-treatment MCV (fl)</b>	89.4±16.3	92.8±14.3	0.37
<b>Pre-treatment serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub>(pg/ml)</b>	146.0±42.1	149.8±37.6	0.82

There were 30 patients each in the oral and intramuscular treatment groups. The distribution of baseline characteristics such as age-sex distribution, clinical features, laboratory parameters, etiology as well as risk factors of both the study groups were similar (table 7). The most common cause of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency was pernicious anemia in both the study groups.

### **Treatment response**

All the 27 patients who completed intramuscular treatment and 20 out of the 22 patients who completed oral therapy, achieved normalization of serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels (table 8).

**Table 8. Post treatment serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels**

<b>Post treatment serum Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> (pg/ml)</b>	<b>Intramuscular (n=27)</b>	<b>Oral (n=22)</b>
<b>&lt;200</b>	Nil	2
<b>200-300</b>	2	2
<b>&gt;300</b>	25	18

The intention to treat analysis, assuming lack of treatment response for the patients who did not complete the study showed no difference in treatment responses between the oral and intramuscular treatment groups (p=0.06).

Similar finding was observed in per protocol analysis as well (p=0.2).

The post treatment parameters of both the study groups are listed below (table 9).

**Table 9. Comparison of post treatment parameters**

Test	Intramuscular	Oral	p value
<b>Serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> (pg/ml)</b>	1128.3±543.0	488.4±173.1	<0.01
<b>Hb (g/dl)</b>	13.4±2.2	12.8±2.0	0.45
<b>MCV(fl)</b>	86.5±8.1	87.3±8.1	>0.05

There was no significant difference in the increase in haemoglobin (Hb) levels or decrease in mean corpuscular volume (MCV) between the oral and intramuscular treatment groups. The increase in serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels after treatment was higher in patients who received intramuscular treatment, compared to those who were on oral therapy (mean change 982.3 vs 338.6 pg/ml respectively,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Serum homocysteine levels before and after treatment were available for 3 patients in intramuscular group and 7 patients in the oral treatment group. The post treatment levels were much lower than the pre-treatment values in all these patients.

Among patients who received oral treatment, there was no difference in treatment response between patients who had pernicious anaemia compared to those who had vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency due to other causes ( $p = 0.37$ )

## **Compliance**

All the patients (from oral as well as intramuscular treatment groups) who completed the study reported  $\geq 80\%$  compliance to treatment.

## **Cost analysis (for 3 months of treatment)**

❖ Cost of oral vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation

= cost of 1000 $\mu$ g methylcobalamin(daily dose) x duration of treatment

= Rs 12.50 x 90

= **Rs 1125.00**

❖ Cost of intramuscular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation

= (cost of 1000 $\mu$ g methylcobalamin + disposable syringe and needle + injection charges)

x number of doses for 3 months

= Rs (190.8 + 5.0 + 30) x 16

= **Rs 3612.80**

## II. Etiology of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency

Complete etiological evaluation was done for the 72 patients detected to have vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency who were screened for the randomized trial. The various causes identified are listed below (table 10)

**Table 10. Causes of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency**

Cause	Number of patients(n=72)	%
<b>Pernicious anaemia</b>	17	24
<b>Atrophic gastritis-H pylori related</b>	13	18
<b>Non H pylori related</b>	2	2
<b>Tropical sprue/enteropathy</b>	5	7
<b>Celiac sprue</b>	4	6
<b>Vegetarian diet</b>	4	6
<b>Ileal resection</b>	2	2
<b>Multiple causes*</b>	17	24
<b>No cause identified</b>	8	11

\*included those causes listed above as well as other causes such as PPI/H<sub>2</sub>RA/Metformin use, pancreatic exocrine insufficiency, persistent giardiasis with malabsorption etc

The most common cause of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency in the study population was pernicious anaemia, followed by atrophic gastritis (involving fundus of stomach). More than one cause existed in 24% patients, which included pancreatic exocrine insufficiency, chronic use of metformin/proton pump inhibitor/H<sub>2</sub> receptor antagonists and parasitic infestation such as refractory giardiasis. No cause was identified for 8 out of 72 study subjects (11%).

### III. Correlation between serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> and homocysteine

For the analysis of correlation between serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> and homocysteine levels, 97 patients (61 male, 37 female) with serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels less than 400pg/ml were enrolled.

47 patients had serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels less than 200pg/ml and 50 had serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> in 200-400pg/ml range.

#### Characteristics of the study population

Table 11 illustrates the distribution of baseline characteristics of the study population (n=97).

**Table 11. Patient characteristics**

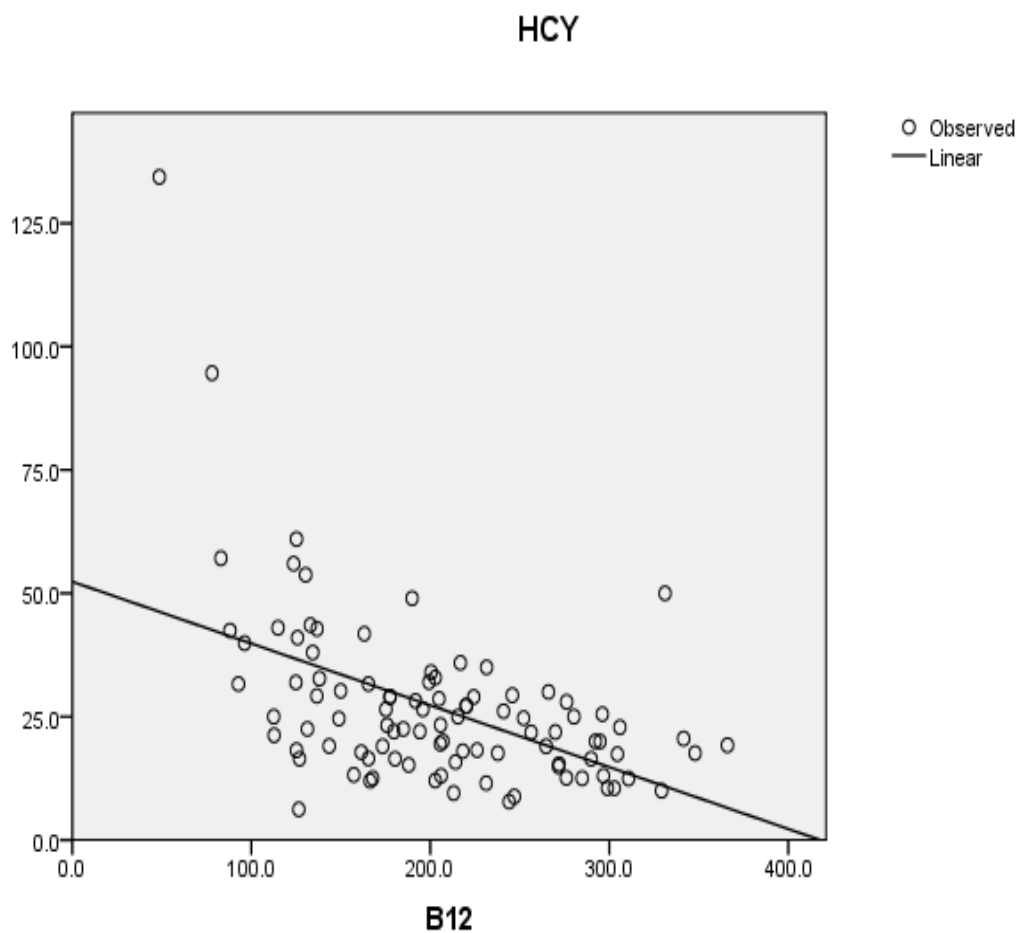
<b>Male gender</b>	<b>61 (63%)</b>
<b>Age (years)</b>	<b>40.9±13.0</b>
<b>Hb (g/dl)</b>	<b>12.3±2.3</b>
<b>MCV(fl)</b>	<b>88.1±12.7</b>
<b>Serum homocysteine (μM)</b>	<b>26.8±17.5</b>
<b>Serum Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>(pg/ml)</b>	<b>203.9±70.0</b>



### Correlation between vitamin B<sub>12</sub> and homocysteine

The correlation between serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> (0-400pg/ml range) and homocysteine is demonstrated below (figure 4)

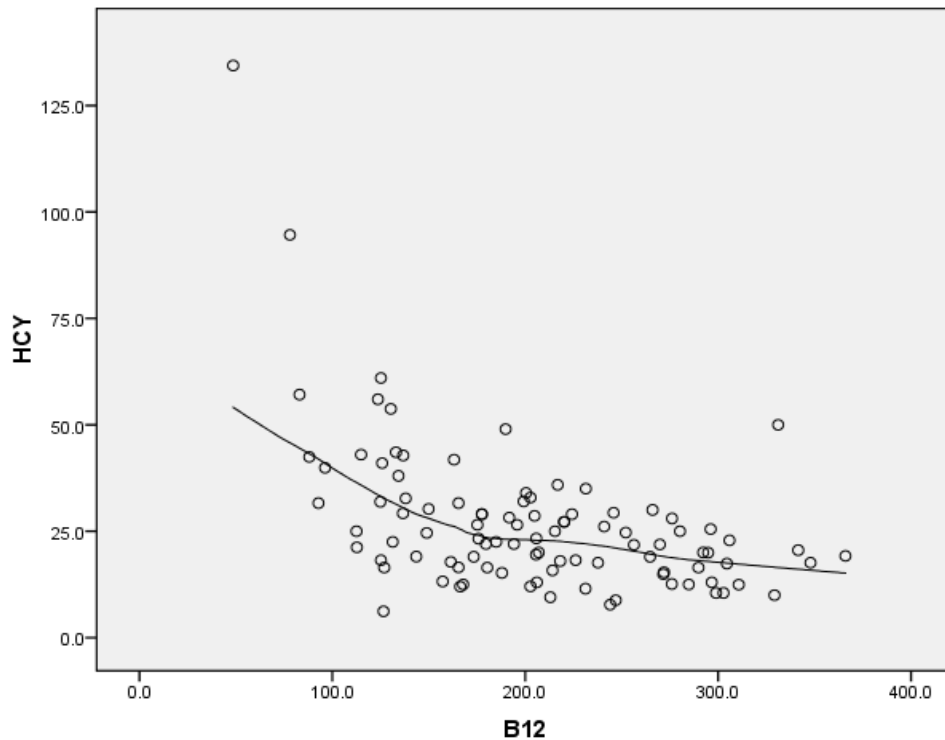
**Figure 4. Correlation between serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> and serum homocysteine**



There was a significant inverse correlation between serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> and homocysteine levels (Spearman correlation coefficient,  $r = -0.47$ ,  $p < 0.01$ )

On further analysis using a Loess curve, it was found that though there was a strong inverse correlation between serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> and serum homocysteine levels in patients with vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency, ie serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> <200 pg/ml (Spearman correlation coefficient,  $r = -0.44$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), the same was not true for the patients with low normal serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels, ie 200-400 pg/ml ((Spearman correlation coefficient,  $r = -0.22$ ,  $p = 0.11$ ). This is demonstrated in the figure below (figure 5)

**Figure 5. Loess curve showing difference in correlation of serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> <200pg/ml and 200-400pg/ml with serum homocysteine**



## **Cellular deficiency of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> in patients with low normal serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub>**

50 patients with a serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> level in the low normal range of 200-400pg/ml were analysed to find out whether they have a cellular deficiency of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, using serum homocysteine as a surrogate marker.

37 patients (74%) had elevated serum homocysteine levels suggestive of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency at cellular level.

Risk factors for vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency (figure 6) such as long term metformin or proton pump inhibitor use, vegetarian diet etc were more common in patients who had hyperhomocysteinemia

The clinical features suggestive of cobalamin deficiency (figure 7) were more common in patients with elevated homocysteine levels, consistent with inadequate intracellular function of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>

Figure 6

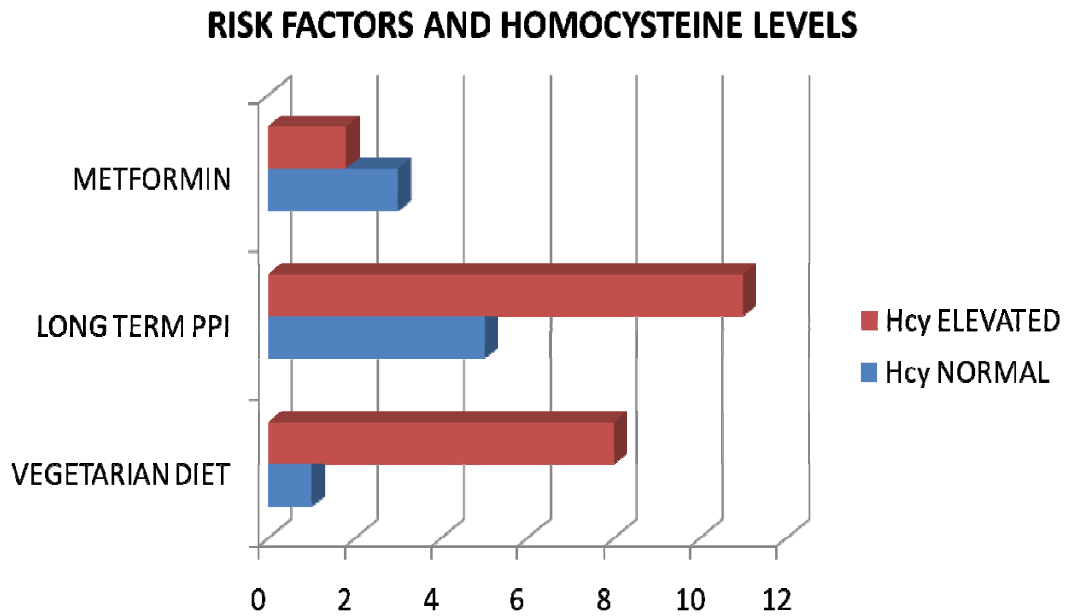
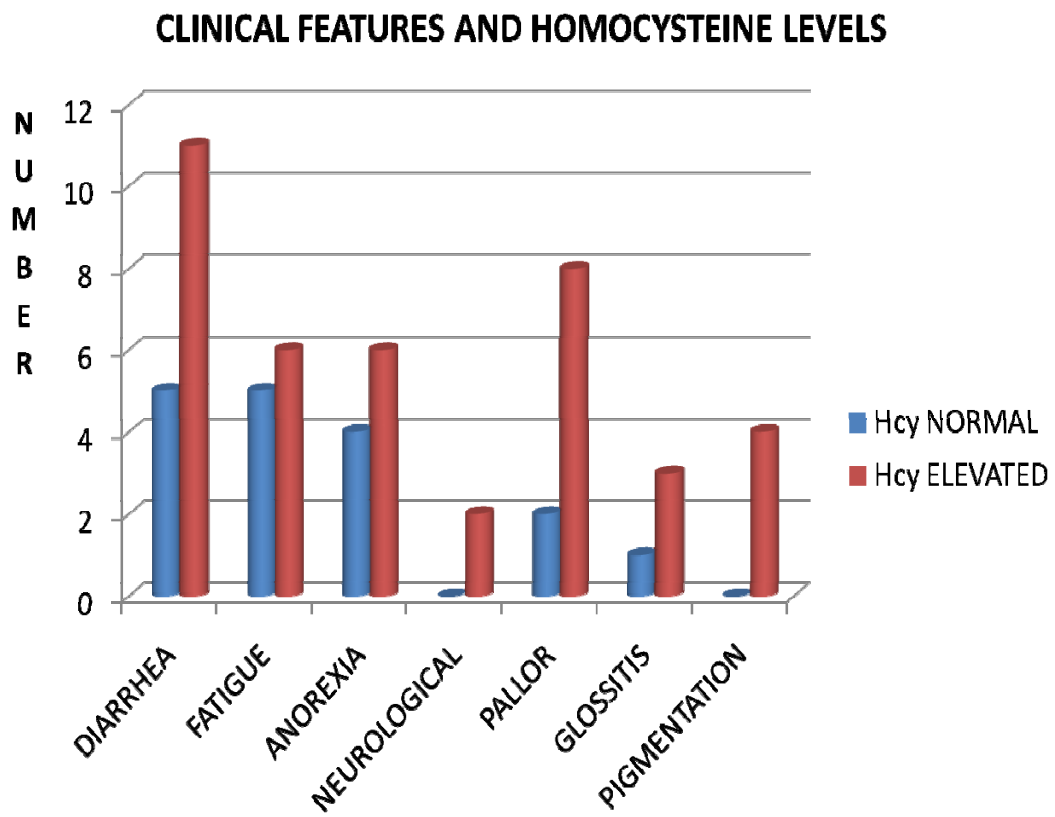
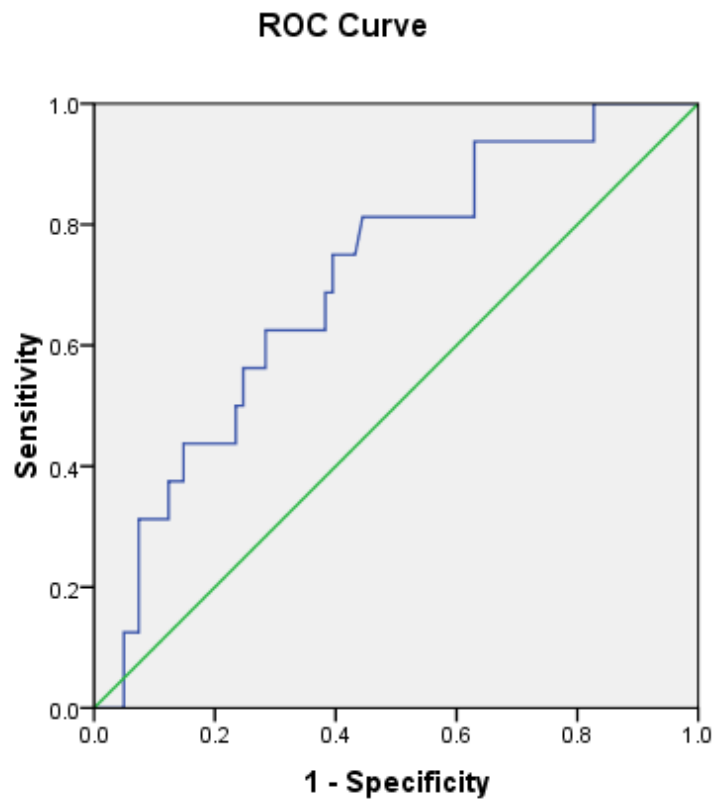


Figure 7



Using receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curve method, the currently recommended lower limit of normal serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> level ( 200 pg/ml) was found to have a sensitivity of only 81.2% for the diagnosis of intracellular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency, using serum homocysteine levels as a surrogate marker.

**Figure 7. ROC curve using serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> and serum homocysteine levels**



Diagonal segments are produced by ties.

## **DISCUSSION**

## DISCUSSION

Studies on rural and urban population in western India have demonstrated a higher prevalence of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency compared to western countries and established its association with hyperhomocysteinemia, which is a known cardiovascular risk factor (14)(1). However, not much is known about the causes of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency in the Indian setting.

Eventhough the vast majority of patients with vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency are in subclinical stage and do not have classically described clinical manifestations, at least some of them may be at an increased risk for developing serious clinical consequences if not detected and treated early. The treatment is safe and remarkably efficacious if initiated before permanent clinical sequelae occur.

The detection of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency is hampered by the poor ability of serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> estimation to reflect cellular deficiency of the vitamin in the low normal/borderline range (2)(25). The above suggests that there is an imminent need for developing a reliable technique for the detection of cellular deficiency of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>. Given the high prevalence of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> in our population, it is also important to evolve a cost effective strategy for its treatment.

The present study determined the etiology of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency in a tertiary care setting, compared the efficacy of oral versus parenteral vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation in patients with vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency, examined the correlation of serum levels of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> and homocysteine, and looked into the presence of cellular deficiency of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> in patients with low normal serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> using serum homocysteine as the surrogate marker. To our knowledge this is the first study of its kind from the Indian subcontinent.

The data available from previous small studies suggest equal efficacy of high dose oral and parenteral modes of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation (table 5, 6). However, data from tropical countries are lacking, and given the difference in gut characteristics in terms of intestinal mucosal morphology, composition of intestinal microbiota and a high prevalence of parasitic infestations, the extrapolation of the western data to our population is questionable.

The present study confirms that oral vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation is as effective as intramuscular treatment in the normalization of serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels in patients with vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency. The improvements in other clinical and laboratory parameters (such as haemoglobin, mean corpuscular volume and serum homocysteine ) were also found to be similar between the two study groups. The patients showed good compliance to both forms of treatment. However the intramuscular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation was three times more expensive compared to the oral therapy and did not seem to confer any significant advantages over oral vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation.

The study also revealed that the response to oral treatment did not differ between patients with vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency due to pernicious anaemia and those with vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency due to other causes. This finding suggests that oral vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation may be effective regardless of the cause of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency.

The majority of patients (74%) with borderline serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels (200-400pg/ml) was found have hyperhomocysteinemia, suggestive of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency at cellular level. The finding substantiates the usefulness of serum homocysteine as an ancillary test to guide treatment in patients with low normal serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels.



We found that a strong inverse correlation exists between serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> and serum homocysteine levels in patients with vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency, consistent with the previous studies by Fakhrzadeh et al and Refsum et al(14)(37). However, a similar correlation was not found in patients with low normal/borderline serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels. This may be partially explained by the poor reliability and high intraindividual variation of serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> estimation in low normal/borderline range (200-400pg/ml) (34). Preliminary studies have reported that plasma holotranscobalamin estimation may be a better indicator of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency as it measures the metabolically active form of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> rather than the total serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels(51). Further studies are needed to identify a cheap, widely available, highly sensitive and specific serum biomarker which accurately reflects the intracellular deficiency of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>.

Using the ROC curve method, it was found that the current serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> level cut off of 200pg/ml fails to identify about 19% of patients with intracellular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency. Large correlational studies between serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> and the novel serum biomarkers of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency are needed to redefine the best cut off value for the lower limit of normal serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels.

The study also throws light into the etiology of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency in a tertiary care setting in India. Pernicious anemia, followed by atrophic gastritis involving gastric fundus were the most common causes. This finding is similar to the data previously reported from the western countries. Importantly, a number of treatable causes like celiac sprue, tropical sprue etc were identified. The cause of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency could be successfully elucidated in 89% of the patients with the combination of endoscopic and laboratory investigations used in the study, even without the use of Schilling's test.

There were a few limitations for our study such as small size of study population and short follow up period. The correlation between serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> and serum homocysteine at serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels >400pg/ml has not been addressed. Concurrent estimation of methyl malonic acid would have allowed a more specific diagnosis of cellular deficiency of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>.

# **CONCLUSIONS**

## CONCLUSIONS

- ❖ Oral vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplementation is cheaper and equally effective as intramuscular treatment for vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency.
- ❖ A majority of patients with borderline serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels (200-400pg/ml) have hyperhomocysteinemia, suggestive of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency at cellular level.
- ❖ Serum homocysteine is a useful ancillary test for the diagnosis of intracellular vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency in patients with low normal/borderline serum vitamin B<sub>12</sub> levels.
- ❖ The most common etiology for vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency in a tertiary care hospital setting in India is pernicious anemia, followed by atrophic gastritis involving fundus of stomach.

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## B12 STUDY-PROFORMA

---

NAME: AGE: yrs SEX: M/F Serial No:

Address: Hospital No:

Phone : Occupation:

E mail:

### FINAL DIAGNOSIS (CAUSE OF B12 DEFICIENCY):

#### PRESENTING COMPLAINTS:

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- 1) Memory loss: Y/N
- 2) Parasthesia: Y/N
- 3) Motor weakness: Y/N
- 4) Ataxia: Y/N
- 5) Psychiatric symptoms: Y/N
- 6) Skin darkening: Y/N
- 7) Fatigue/malaise: Y/N
- 8) Diarrhea: Y/N
- 9) Anorexia: Y/N

## PAST AND TREATMENT HISTORY:

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- 1) Diabetes mellitus: Y/N. Duration:
- 2) Hypertension : Y/N. Duration :
- 3) IHD: Y/N. Duration:
- 4) Dyslipidemia: Y/N
- 5) CVA in past: Y/N
- 6) Drug history: PPIs- Y/N duration : mon  
H2RAs- Y/N duration : mon  
METFORMIN- Y/N duration : mon
- 7) Smoking: Y/N
- 8) Alcohol: Y/N Qty: Duration: Last intake:
- 9) Diet: veg/ non-veg /vegan
- 10) GI surgery: Y/N Ind: Procedure:  
Year:
- 11) Occupational exposure: Nitrous oxide Y/N  
Other toxins Y/N

## EXAMINATION:

-----

- 1) pallor: Y/N
- 2) glossitis: Y/N
- 3) oral ulcers Y/N
- 4) pedal edema: Y/N
- 5) skin hyperpigmentation: Y/N

- 6) RS:
- 7) CVS:
- 8) P/A:
- 9) CNS: optic neuritis/ atrophy:

Peripheral neuropathy:

Myelopathy:

Hemiplegia:

UMN facial palsy:

Plantar:

Ataxia/ post column signs:

Cerebellar signs:

Pyramidal signs:

10) **MMSE:**

1) date: (year)(season)(date)(day)(month) - \_\_/5 points

2) Where are we: (state)(county)(town)(hospital)(floor) - \_\_/5 points

3) Name three objects: one second to say each. Ask the patient all three after you have said them. Give one point for each correct answer. Then repeat them until he/she learns all three.

Maximum score - \_\_/3 points.

4) Serial 7s, beginning with 100 and counting backward: one point for each correct; stop after five answers. Alternatively, spell WORLD backwards: one point for each letter that is in correct order. Maximum score - \_\_/5 points.

- 5) Ask for the three objects repeated above: one point for each correct. Maximum score - \_\_\_/3 points
- 6) Show and ask patient to name a pencil and wrist watch - \_\_\_/2 points
- 7) Repeat the following, "No ifs ands or buts." Allow only one trial - \_\_\_/1 point
- 8) Follow a three stage command, "Take a paper in your right hand, fold it in half, and put it on the floor." Score one point for each task executed. Maximum score - \_\_\_/3 points
- 9) On a blank piece of paper write "close your eyes," and ask the patient to read and do what it says - \_\_\_/1 point
- 10) Give the patient a blank piece of paper and ask him/her to write a sentence. The sentence must contain a noun and verb and be sensible. Ask him to copy a intersecting pentagon- \_\_\_/2 points

**TOTAL MMSE: \_\_\_/30**

**LAB PARAMETERS:**

**1) HB:                      TC:                      PLT:                      RETICS:**

**2) MCV:**

**3) PERIPHERAL SMEAR:**

**4) T.B/D.B:                      AG RATIO:                      LDH:**

**5) VITAMIN B12:                      FOLATE:**

**6) TSH:**

**7) URINE D-XYLOSE**

**8) HIV ELISA:**

**9)ANTI PARIETAL CELL Ab - anti IF –**

**10)ANTI TTG +/-**

**11) STOOL PARASITES- OCCULT BLOOD-**

**12)SERUM HOMOCYSTEINE**

**OTHER RELEVANT INVESTIGATIONS:**

### **IMAGING STUDIES**

**A.USG/CECT ABDOMEN:**

**B.BMFT:**

### **ENDOSCOPIC EVALUATION**

**A.GASTROSCOPY:**

**B.COLONOSCOPY:**

**HISTOPATHOLOGY:**

**A.STOMACH:**

**B.DUODENUM:**

**C.ILEUM:**

**FOLLOW UP VISIT (after 3 months)**

1) SYMPTOMS – IMPROVED/ NO CHANGE/ WORSENER

2) FINDINGS – IMPROVED/ NO CHANGE/ WORSENER

3)LABORATORY INVESTIGATIONS - Hb      MCV

- VITAMIN B 12

- OTHER

4)COMPLIANCE

## INFORMED CONSENT

I understand that department of Gastrointestinal sciences, Christian Medical College, Vellore is doing a study to

- (i) identify the etiological factors of vitamin B12 deficiency
- (ii) compare the efficacy of oral versus parenteral vitamin B12 supplementation in subjects with deficiency of the vitamin, and
- (iii) evaluate whether serum homocysteine levels can be used as a surrogate marker of intracellular deficiency of vitamin B12 in patients with low normal serum Vitamin B12 levels

The study involves collection of patient information, clinical data and test reports done as part of regular clinical care. I also understand that some of the tests done in connection with the study may directly benefit me whereas the other tests are likely to benefit other patients with the disease.

I understand that I may receive either oral or intramuscular vitamin B12 as treatment and have been informed that either route of administration is equally efficacious according to the available scientific evidence at present.

I understand that my withdrawal from the study, at any time will not affect the treatment being given.

Study Title: **COMPARISON OF EFFICACY OF ORAL VERSUS INTRAMUSCULAR VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> SUPPLEMENTATION FOR TREATMENT OF VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> DEFICIENCY AND DETERMINATION OF CELLULAR DEFICIENCY OF VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> USING SERUM HOMOCYSTEINE AS A SURROGATE MARKER IN PATIENTS WITH LOW NORMAL SERUM VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> LEVELS**

Study Number:

Subject's Initials: \_\_\_\_\_ Subject's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth / Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Please initial box

(Subject)

(i) I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated \_\_\_\_\_ for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. [    ]

(ii) I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my medical care or legal rights being affected. [    ]

(iii) I understand that the Sponsor of the clinical trial, others working on the Sponsor's behalf, the Ethics Committee and the regulatory authorities will not need my permission to look at my health records both in respect of the current study and any further research that may be conducted in relation to it, even if I withdraw from the trial. I agree to this access. However, I understand that my identity will not be revealed in any information released to third parties or published. [    ]

(iv) I agree not to restrict the use of any data or results that arise from this study provided such a use is only for scientific purpose(s) [    ]

(v) I agree to take part in the above study. [    ]

Signature (or Thumb impression) of the Subject/Legally Acceptable Representative: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Signatory's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Study Investigator's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Name of the Witness: \_\_\_\_\_



## KEY TO MASTERCHART

### I. B12 TRIAL –ORAL VS INTRAMUSCULAR TREATMENT (masterchart 1)

- R No – random allocation number [arranged by category –intramuscular, followed by oral, and then followed by patients who were screened for trial, but excluded(X1-X12) for various reasons and considered only for etiological evaluation]
- HOS NO – hospital number
- G – gender
- A - age
- State
  - TN – tamil nadu
  - WB – west bengal
  - AP – andhra pradesh
  - JHA – jharkhand
  - KAR – karnataka
  - MEGHA – meghalaya
  - TRIPU – tripura
  - CHAT - chattisgarh
- CAT- Category
  - 1 : intramuscular treatment group
  - 2 : oral treatment group
  - 3 : screened, but excluded from the trial (considered only for etiology)
- DX- Diagnosis
  - 0 : no cause identified
  - 1 : pernicious anaemia
  - 2 : coeliac sprue
  - 3 : tropical sprue/enteropathy
  - 4 : inflammatory bowel disease (A-Crohn's disease, B-ulcerative colitis)
  - 5 : vegetarian diet
  - 6 : drug (A-PPI,B-H<sub>2</sub>RA,C-METFORMIN)

- 7 : atrophic gastritis (A- Hpylori related, B- Non Hpylori related)
- 8 : pancreatic exocrine insufficiency
- 9 : ileal surgery
- S – symptoms (1=present,2=absent)
- S1 – memory disturbances (1=present,2=absent)
- S2 – parasthesias (1=present,2=absent)
- S3 – psychiatric disturbances (1=present,2=absent)
- S4 – skin hyperpigmentation (1=present,2=absent)
- S5 – fatigue/malaise (1=present,2=absent)
- S6 – diarrhea (1=present,2=absent)
- S7 – anorexia (1=present,2=absent)
- DM – diabetes mellitus (1=present,2=absent)
- HT – hypertension (1=present,2=absent)
- IHD – ischaemic heart disease
- DL – dyslipidemia (1=present,2=absent)
- CV – cerebrovascular accident (1=present,2=absent)
- D1 – proton pump inhibitor use (1=present,2=absent)
- D2 – metformin use (1=present,2=absent)
- SM- smoking (1=present,2=absent)
- AL-alcohol abuse(1=present,2=absent)
- DE- diet (1-vegetarian,2-nonvegetarian)
- SX – ileal surgery
- F1 – pallor (1=present,2=absent)
- F2 - glossitis (1=present,2=absent)
- F3 – oral ulcers (1=present,2=absent)
- F4 – neurological findings (1=present,2=absent)
- HB1- pretreatment haemoglobin(g/dl)
- HB2 – posttreatment haemoglobin(g/dl)
- MC1 – pretreatment mean corpuscular volume(fl)
- MC2 – posttreatment mean corpuscular volume(fl)
- B12A - pretreatment serum vitamin B12(pg/ml)
- B12B - posttreatment serum vitamin B12(pg/ml)

- HC1 – pretreatment serum homocysteine ( $\mu\text{M/L}$ )
- HC2 – posttreatment serum homocysteine ( $\mu\text{M/L}$ )
- RX – treatment response (1=responded, 2=not responded)
- AP – antiparietal cell antibody (1=present,2=absent)
- IF – antiintrinsic factor antibody (1=present,2=absent)
- TTG– anti tissue transglutaminase antibody (1=present,2=absent)
- SP- stool parasites(1=present,2=absent)
- HPA – histopathology of antrum, HPF- histopathology of fundus (stomach)
  - 1- normal
  - 2- chronic atrophic gastritis, Hpylori related
  - 3- chronic atrophic gastritis, non Hpylori related
  - 4- autoimmune gastritis
  - 5- other
- HPD – histopathology of duodenum, HPI – histopathology of ileum
  - N- normal
  - X – data not available
- HP – Helicobacter pylori (1=present,2=absent)
- SUB – subjective improvement (1=improved, 2=worsened, 3=no change)
- COM – compliance (%)

## II. VITAMIN B12 – HOMOCYSTEINE CORRELATION (masterchart 2)

- H No – Hospital number
- State
  - TN – tamil nadu
  - WB – west bengal
  - AP – andhra pradesh
  - JHA – jharkhand
  - KAR – karnataka
  - ORI – orissa
  - MEGHA – meghalaya
  - TRIPU – tripura
  - CHAT - chattisgarh
  - BAN - bangladesh
- HB – haemoglobin (g/dl)
- MCV – mean corpuscular volume (fl)
- B12 – serum vitamin B12 (pg/ml)
- HCY – serum homocysteine ( $\mu$ M/L)
- PSY – psychiatric symptoms (1=present,2=absent)
- SKI – skin hyperpigmentation (1=present,2=absent)
- MAL – fatigue/malaise (1=present,2=absent)
- DIA – diarrhea (1=present,2=absent)
- AX – anorexia (1=present,2=absent)
- H2R – H2 receptor antagonist use (1=present, 2=absent)
- MET – metformin use (1=present,2=absent)
- DIET - (1=vegetarian,2=non vegetarian)
- SUR- ileal surgery (1=yes,2=no)
- PAL – pallor (1=present,2=absent)
- GL – glossitis (1=present,2=absent)
- OR – oral ulcers (1=present,2=absent)
- STOMACH/DUODENAL HISTOLOGY (X –data not available)





